

Stepping into the Breach:

A community-driven strategy for equitable recovery and rebuilding in New York's hardest hit neighborhoods

Hurricane Sandy Research Report: Queens, New York City



Mrs. "Gutierrez" is the mother of 4 children, living in a Hurricane Sandy damaged apartment in Far Rockaway. She lost her job as a domestic worker as a result of Sandy, and is now unable to pay their \$1500/month rent. She lived without electricity for 2 weeks and without heat for 3 weeks. Her 1 year old baby this week was diagnosed with lead poisoning - his nurse said it was probably poisonous air, paint, or dirty water caused by Sandy. Two days ago, her 6 year old came home from school vomiting. And her 16 year old has had nausea and headaches since Sandy. Her landlord will not repair their broken windows, and wants to charge them full rent for the month of November. They are trying desperately to find another place to live.

Summary

Key Highlights:

- Nearly 6 weeks after Sandy, **approximately 10,000 homes are still without electricity** in the Rockaway Peninsula, and **more are without heat** as winter temperatures drop below freezing
- The Bloomberg Administration's relief response has been slow and inadequate in Queens: As of December 5th, **only 174 homes (out of 38,000 homes and businesses on the Rockaway Peninsula)** have received repairs through the Rapid Repair Program. **8,500 homes are still waiting to be assessed** nearly 6 weeks after Sandy.
- **Deteriorating health conditions** in the Rockaway Peninsula: Contamination of homes and air caused by **microbial growth due to flooding and a mold epidemic** has led to pulmonary problems dubbed the "Rockaway Cough".
- The city's Rapid Repair Program only addresses heat, hot water, and electricity, **but not mold remediation**, which is becoming a severe health issue.
- As of Wednesday November 28, only 6,815 families in New York and New Jersey are utilizing FEMA's Transitional Sheltering Assistance Program. This means **thousands of people are living in contaminated environments or staying with family / friends without access to temporary housing**.
- High unemployment before Hurricane Sandy and job losses due to Sandy are creating immense pressures on families, and there is **no long-term plan to create local living wage job training and placement opportunities** for those impacted by the storm.
- Undocumented immigrants are New Yorkers and human beings who also suffered major job and home losses, but **cannot qualify for State Disaster Unemployment Assistance**.
- Limited public transit options are causing **2 to 3 hour commutes to and from work and school**, adding another burden to families trying to recover from the destruction.

Ten Point Strategy for Equitable Recovery and Rebuilding (see page 14):

IMMEDIATE RELIEF:

1. Fix the NYC Rapid Repair Program: immediately increase supply of electricians and plumbers by granting waivers for licensed contractors from outside of New York City
2. Include mold remediation as work covered by the NYC Rapid Repair Program, in addition to electricity, heat, and hot water
3. Increase testing sites for health and air quality in "Zone A" (Coastal NYC - hardest hit areas)

4. Create special "relief fund" and broaden eligibility requirements for State Disaster Unemployment Assistance and FEMA to provide immediate aid to New Yorkers who don't qualify for government disaster assistance
5. Keep FEMA and OEM Emergency Supply shelters open until at least 8:00pm through January 1, 2013 to service workers who arrive home late

LONG TERM RECOVERY AND REBUILDING:

6. Insurance: Hold insurance companies accountable to hurricane-affected residents
7. Housing: Build new affordable housing for middle and low-income families to replace damaged housing
8. Jobs: Convene a "Hurricane Sandy Recovery Economic Development Plan" that includes recovery and rebuilding jobs and job training opportunities that will put local, affected residents back to work
9. Federal request: Use federal dollars to create grants for congregations to repair and rebuild, and to increase availability of public transit options for stranded residents
10. Oversight: Facilitate a community-driven process to plan and oversee the rebuilding of New York communities devastated by Hurricane Sandy, and create a "Citizens Oversight Committee" to ensure local, state, and federal tax dollars are spent on local community priorities

Introduction

On Monday, October 29th, 2012, Hurricane Sandy, a Category 1 hurricane, slammed into the Northeastern Coast of the United States. Sandy is being referred to as a "Superstorm" because sustained winds were just below hurricane force when it came onshore. The New Jersey Coastline, Long Island, Lower Manhattan, Brooklyn (Coney Island, Red Hook), Staten Island, and the Queens Coastline (the Rockaway Peninsula, Broad Channel, Howard Beach) all sustained high levels of physical damage and human suffering:

- At least 125 deaths were attributed to Sandy in the United States
- 8.1 million homes lost power
- Businesses lost \$25 billion worth of business activity according to IHS Global Insight, many of which are small businesses damaged by the storm
- \$19 billion in damages to New York City (estimated)
- \$42 billion in damages to New York State (estimated)

- \$79 billion worth of damages to region (estimated)



Displaced residents and volunteers unload emergency supply trucks

Queens is one of the most diverse places in the world, with 138 languages spoken and more than 50% of residents born in a foreign country. As such, Hurricane Sandy displaced and ravaged the lives of families from all different socioeconomic and racial backgrounds: African-Americans, Whites, Latinos, Asians, Blacks, immigrants from Latin America and the Caribbean. Many low-income neighborhoods and residents living in public housing projects in places like Rockaway Beach, Far Rockaway, and Inwood were struggling with the effects of unemployment, immigration pressures, violence, and lack of access to essential health services well before Hurricane Sandy struck. Seniors, immigrants, and disabled people have been hit especially hard by Hurricane Sandy, as many are still unable to leave the upper floors of their flooded buildings.

Gas shortages throughout the region ensued for 3 weeks after Hurricane Sandy. Drivers slept in their vehicles overnight, waiting dozens of hours in line for a gasoline truck to arrive. For example, one JFK Airport taxi cab driver who was interviewed waited in line for 10 hours to get gasoline on Saturday, November 3rd. New Yorkers resorted to waiting in line for approximately one hour with gas cans in hand.



Residents of Queens wait for hours to fill gas cans

Disaster Relief Effort: Congregations and Grassroots Volunteers Respond

In Queens, volunteers and relief agencies responded quickly by staging "Emergency Supply Shelters" in congregations within "Zone A" (the low-lying coastal sections of Queens) to distribute items such as food, clothing, hygienic supplies, blankets, baby items, and cleaning supplies. Some of the congregations that created Emergency Supply Shelters were:

- Alive Ministries, Far Rockaway
- American Legion Hall, Broad Channel
- Berea Community of Jesus, Far Rockaway
- Community Church of the Nazarene, Far Rockaway
- Full Gospel Tabernacle, Far Rockaway
- Glory Light Tabernacle, Far Rockaway
- God's Pentecostal Church, Far Rockaway
- Mount Carmel Baptist Church, Far Rockaway
- Remnants of Glory, Far Rockaway
- St. Camillus, Rockaway Beach
- St. Francis de Sales, Belle Harbor
- St. Gertrude, Far Rockaway
- St. Helen's, Howard Beach
- St. Mary Star of the Sea, Far Rockaway
- World Harvest Ministries, Far Rockaway

Apostle Annette Deer, her son Pastor Michael Deer, and her daughter-in-law Virginia Deer were all displaced by Sandy when their home was flooded. They have since been living inside their church building and relying on family and friends for support. Their three-year old daughter suffers from medical problems that could have been exacerbated by moldy conditions had they remained in their home. Apostle Deer has yet to get the help she needs to fix her boiler and electricity. Despite their own needs, the Deer family has opened the church to other families in the congregations as a shelter and have received and distributed supplies from the sanctuary of their church for weeks.

Queens Congregations United for Action (QCUA), a member of the PICO National Network, responded by providing information to volunteers and clergy from its network of 40 congregations across Queens with instructions on how to help: what supplies were in greatest need, where to deliver those supplies, and who was in need of spiritual and pastoral support. QCUA and its volunteer leaders facilitated the

arrival of **over 150 volunteers** from throughout Queens congregations and faith communities during the past 5 weeks to help with emergency supply distribution, repairing damaged homes, and conducting relational outreach to over 500 people. QCUA volunteers and clergy also set up a temporary warming center and supply shelter at Beach 94th Street and Rockaway Beach, which served Thanksgiving meals to 2015 people and distributed goods to 616 people in a single day.



Sister Valerie Close and faith Leaders from Christ Church International volunteer at St. Camillus

QCUA worked alongside many other organizations and agencies involved in the immediate relief effort, including Catholic Charities, Adventist Community Services, Occupy Faith, Occupy Sandy, the American Red Cross, and Team Rubicon.

QCUA committed itself to understanding what families hardest hit by Hurricane Sandy will need to recover and rebuild their lives and communities. So in addition to providing supplies and volunteers, QCUA community residents and volunteers **conducted relational outreach** through listening and surveying residents in Howard Beach and the Rockaway Peninsula. QCUA faith volunteer leaders and staff collected over 500 surveys and spoke with approximately 950 residents in an effort to identify the short and long term needs of

families in Queens. 57 clergy and faith leaders from across the Rockaways and Queens attended a Clergy Luncheon in Far Rockaway on Monday, November 26th. And on Friday, November 30th, 20 QCUA clergy and leaders met with 5 elected officials from New York City and the State Legislature, as well as a senior administrator from FEMA, to inform the results of this report, "Stepping Into the Breach":

Valerie Close, a resident of Rockaway Beach, lost two cars, her day care center and many personal items in the severe flooding that affected her apartment.

Yet she has spent the past month helping to run volunteer operations, first at St. Camillus, and now at a warming tent and supply tent that she manages on Beach 94th St. She was also instrumental in bringing members of her church, Christ Church International, to the Rockaways to volunteer.

- US Congressman Gregory Meeks
- New York State Assemblymember Phil Goldfeder
- New York State Assemblymember Michelle Titus (staff)
- New York City Council Speaker Christine Quinn (staff)

- New York City Councilmember and New York State Senator-elect James Sanders (staff)
- Mike Carl, FEMA Queens Division Supervisor
- Morgan Jones, Eastern Queens Director, Community Affairs Unit, Office of Mayor Bloomberg

QCUA's clergy and faith leaders are committed for the long haul, as the **faith community in Queens has an interest in shaping the policy and resource decisions that will determine how and for whom the city is rebuilt after Hurricane Sandy and how it will prepare for future disasters.**

From early on in the disaster relief response, volunteers and coordinators of the Emergency Supply Shelters listed above spoke of a lack of coordination and widespread confusion among residents seeking essential, life-saving items. For example, by week 2, while the Emergency Supply Shelter at St. Camillus in Rockaway Beach had an abundance of cleaning supplies and baby items through donations and deliveries, St. Helen's in Howard Beach had no baby items or cleaning supplies to distribute to desperate residents. During week 3 of the disaster relief response, the Emergency Supply Shelter at St. Francis de Sales received a large shipment of over 100 space heaters for families who lost heat and were shivering through freezing temperatures, while shelters in Far Rockaway had no such items. Volunteers spent hours in their cars picking up essential goods from one emergency shelter and delivering them to a different emergency shelter or neighborhood in another part of Queens. With no single agency or person in charge of the deployment of emergency items, chaos ensued.

The Three "R's" of the Hurricane Sandy Disaster Response

Emergency Management commonly involves a three stage response process which addresses immediate, short-term and long-term needs of the affected community:

1. **Relief:** providing emergency aid and assistance to protect lives and make sure that basic needs are met, minimizing secondary damages and property loss, clean-up and returning necessary utilities such as power and heat to homes and businesses
2. **Recovery:** immediate support during the early post-disaster period to restore day-to-day operations and enable the community to resume their normal life activities; involves relocating people from shelters to temporary or permanent housing, making sure people have the resources and help to get back into their homes, re-opening schools and/or re-assigning schools, re-opening congregations and public services, addressing insurance accountability and fairness
3. **Rebuilding** – sustainable re-development for healthy, long-term community life; involves new housing development, putting people back to work and ensuring employment and quality jobs, re-building damaged transportation network, preparation for future disasters and mitigation of potential disruption as experienced in current disaster, improvement upon current infrastructure conditions.

What is working well

- The NYC Department of Sanitation has been working around the clock to clean up debris and lost personal items, which filled the streets after Hurricane Sandy. The Army Corps said it has hauled 4,500 tons to Jacob Riis Park in the Rockaways already; the Sanitation Department, which is also using the site, said it has cycled through ten times that amount. Two miles of debris currently fill Jacob Riis Park. However, some have noted that the Jacob Riis site is too close to the residential areas and that the wind may continue to bring contamination from the debris back into the local air.



Beach 100th Street after Hurricane Sandy - personal items washed away by the storm

- Volunteer organizations from various congregations and organizations have been very effective in providing relief for Hurricane Sandy victims. QCUA, Occupy Sandy, and New York Communities for Change (NYCC) have canvassed thousands of homes, ensuring that the elderly and disabled are not remaining in homes without assistance, and have provided numerous volunteers for congregations throughout the peninsula. Congregations remain steadfast in offering distribution centers, shelters, and moral support for thousands of Rockaway residents.
- The National Guard responded strongly to immediate needs of Rockaway residents, providing food and basic necessities and going door-to-door to offer assistance to those who stayed in their homes. In conjunction with the NYPD, the National Guard has offered more security to the area, offering comfort to families who are concerned about looters in the wake of Hurricane Sandy.

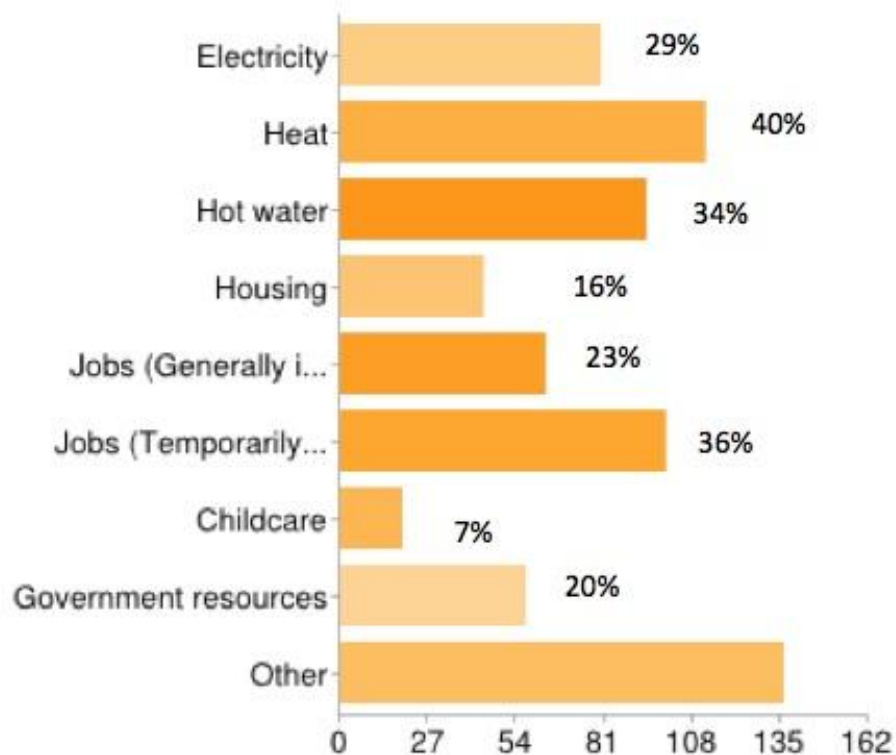
Areas of Concern

The 1,150 surveys and relational outreach conversations collected through QCUA faith leaders and clergy reveal the most pressing concerns of families in the weeks following Hurricane Sandy. The graph below illustrates the percentage of surveyed individuals that identified electricity, heat, hot water,

housing, employment, government resources, and childcare as a top concern. Heat, jobs, hot water, and electricity were the most urgent factors weighing on residents following the super-storm and continue to trouble people as of December 3rd, five weeks later.

Below the graph is a list of concerns identified by congregations in Queens regarding the implementation of relief efforts and sustainable recovery in New York City.

Rockaways Survey Responses



** Note that 23% were generally in need of jobs, and 36% temporarily lost jobs due to Hurricane Sandy*

1. Unequal response to disaster relief continues to cause unnecessary suffering

As of December 1st (a full 33 days after Hurricane Sandy hit the region), **there were still 11,000 people without electricity in the Rockaway Peninsula**, and many more without heat and/or hot water. Compare that to the rest of New York City, where as of Thanksgiving, fewer than 700 people remained without electricity. And as of November 21st, only 1% of Jersey Central Power and Light customers were out of power. Power and heat restoration to homes and businesses in the Rockaway Peninsula must be performed on an individual basis, as electrical boxes and boilers were flooded and must be replaced with new ones. Mayor Michael Bloomberg created the "Rapid Repair

Program" to assess and replace electrical boxes and boilers at no cost to the owners of the property. However, as of December 1st, **only 160 homes (out of 38,000 homes and businesses in the Rockaway Peninsula)** have received repairs through Rapid Repair Program, and **as of December 5th, only 174 homes** have received completed repairs. At that rate of 2.8 homes per day (with a waiting list of 8,500 properties, and 2,950 assessments completed as of December 5th), it will take over 8 years to complete the necessary work. Mayor Bloomberg has promised that number should quadruple within the next week, although that would still equal only 640 homes, which is still not nearly fast enough to keep pace with the looming freezing nighttime winter temperatures. As noted above, contractors hired through the program have assessed 2,950 properties, **but 8,500 are still waiting to be assessed**. Mayor Bloomberg insists that contractors working in New York City must carry a New York City license, which is largely responsible for the slow response, as demand greatly outweighs the supply of NYC licensed electricians and plumbers.

Additionally, renters cannot request Rapid Repairs, only property owners. In places like Far Rockaway, renters greatly outnumber property owners, which means that thousands of families must sit and wait in the cold for their landlord to request Rapid Repairs. **Negligent landlords are preventing their tenants from accessing life saving repairs.**



2. Limited housing options

Hurricane Sandy destroyed more than 300,000 housing units with a damaging cost of \$9.6 billion. Many homeowners are struggling to pay for and/or acquire assistance to replace appliances and repair moldy and water-damaged structures. While FEMA offers grants, they cannot be obtained until insurance is paid out to homeowners, yet insurance companies are giving homeowners the run-around as noted in #3 below. **The application process for FEMA's grants begin with asking people who are already in debt to take out more debt before being able to access grants or other forms of financial support.** Moreover, for those families who need more time to repair homes, few temporary housing options were made available as the city prefers to keep people in their homes, forcing families to return to moldy and unsafe living environments. Tenants alike are being told to

remain in their apartments by landlords, with the threat of losing their residency in this time of housing scarcity. Although FEMA has made hotel space available to 60,000 families through the FEMA Transitional Sheltering Assistance Program, as of Wednesday November 28, only 6,815 families between New York and New Jersey were utilizing this program. Not only does this tell a story of inefficient government response, but also poor communication and coordination by government agencies. **Families are being squeezed by misguided and contradictory policies: the decision to not provide temporary shelter to residents in an effort to keep residents in their homes, while not taking adequate action to provide the power, heat, insurance reimbursement and mold remediation needed to make the homes livable.** Families in Queens are concerned about looting if they leave their homes, and all are faced with few alternative housing options even if they could leave their homes.

3. Insurance companies are not honoring claims from policyholders

We heard widespread reports of insurance companies creating headaches for overburdened victims of Hurricane Sandy. 360,000 people have filed insurance claims, but **FEMA's Division Supervisor for Queens reported to us that flood insurance claims are taking too long to settle**, leaving residents in limbo. At least one person we spoke with filed for a claim with HSBC Bank, who believed he was covered for the flooding of his home. However, when HSBC denied his claim, they informed him that the Rockaway Peninsula had been re-designated a "non-flood zone" one year prior. **Others have been informed that their homes were flooded as the result of a "Superstorm" as opposed to a "Hurricane" and therefore are not legally entitled to full disaster claims.**

4. Limited local and quality employment options

Small businesses like restaurants, markets, gift shops, and bakeries were devastated in Zone A throughout Queens. Shuttered businesses can be seen driving down Cross Bay Blvd through Howard Beach and on Rockaway Beach Blvd in Rockaway Beach. Many owners of small businesses and their employees have been out of work now for weeks as they restore power and clean up their damaged buildings. Some small businesses will likely never open again, and **these unemployed residents of coastal Queens are concerned about whether or not temporary jobs to help with the clean up and rebuilding of Zone A will go to local workers, or to laborers from outside the borough or city.** One member of First Congregational Church in the Rockaway Peninsula commented, "Do not just restore a broken infrastructure; rebuild the boardwalk and build new infrastructure that can support local business and help the community preserve and benefit from their prime beach front location". Governor Cuomo has secured a \$27 million federal grant from the National Emergency Grant to hire 5,000 unemployed New Yorkers to clean up recovering communities. In addition to this grant, Cuomo has committed to create a local hire program to train and employ up to 700 people from the Rockaway Peninsula at a rate of \$15/hour. Despite this message from the governor's office, stating that the State Department of Labor which will administer the funds "will work with communities to identify cleanup areas and deploy workers to job sites," **Rockaway locals, congregations and organizations have little to no information regarding access to these jobs.** Elected officials have

expressed concern as well about the manner in which these jobs are being advertised, which has mostly been via flyers and an internet site. QCUA surveys and conversations with clergy indicate that fewer efforts have been made to identify and hire residents local to Rockaway through more effective means, such as job fairs and door knocking.

5. Many New Yorkers do not qualify for disaster relief

Hundreds of low wage workers living in the Rockaway Peninsula either lost their jobs completely or lost days of work due to Hurricane Sandy. Domestic workers, who traveled to places like Long Beach, Breezy Point, and Long Island to clean homes and care for children, **lost their jobs as the homes where they worked were damaged**. Additionally, damages to the NYC MTA Public Transportation System **caused low-income immigrants to miss work**. The A subway line that connects the Rockaway Peninsula to mainland Queens is still inoperable, and will be until at least Spring 2013. The New York State Department of Labor administers Disaster Unemployment Assistance (DUA), which is designed to support individuals who were unable to arrive at work or who lost their jobs as a result of Hurricane Sandy. However, although undocumented immigrants are an important aspect of the New York economy and community, **they do not qualify for State DUA or FEMA benefits** (if they do not have a US-born dependent). Undocumented immigrants are New Yorkers and human beings who continue to suffer the same as everyone else, and who are desperate for the same amount of relief, but are treated unequally. **Congregations and faith communities are filling much of the gap to assist immigrants in paying rent and purchasing essential items, but the entire burden should not be on churches and institutions to cover the void left by the State and Federal Government.**

6. Health Conditions in the Rockaway Peninsula continue to deteriorate

With the proliferation of mold in homes and businesses flooded by Hurricane Sandy, air quality has worsened. Many residents complain of the "**Rockaway Cough**," which is afflicting first responders and residents who are living in flooded homes. The 2 miles of debris and trash at Jacob Riis Park, coupled with winds coming off Jamaica Bay and the Atlantic Ocean, have combined to create unhealthy breathing conditions. In addition, there are reports of outbreaks of staph infections affecting people whose plumbing was backed up by raw sewage. **At least one person living near Far Rockaway Beach was diagnosed by a medical doctor with incurable staph infection on his face due to the backup of raw sewage and unsanitary conditions in his home caused by Hurricane Sandy.** And last week a resident of Rockaway Beach came to the Emergency Supply Shelter on Beach 94th Street complaining about sand and debris coming out of the tap in his sink.

With the recent closing of 2 hospitals on or near the Rockaway Peninsula (Peninsula Hospital Center in April 2012 and Mary Immaculate Hospital in 2009), only one overburdened hospital is left on the

Rockaway Peninsula, St. John's Episcopal Hospital, and serves 115,000 working- and middle-class residents.

The Bloomberg administration is addressing mold remediation through the distribution of flyers informing residents about how to manage the growing mold problem; however, flyers do not kill mold.

7. Limited Public Transit options are creating an enormous burden upon students and workers

Thousands of residents relying on transportation to the mainland are being forced to resort to alternate and much slower means of transportation following the destruction of the A train. The A line tracks and bridge over Jamaica bay underwent significant damage during flooding and **officials do not expect the A-line to be back in service until spring 2013**. Meanwhile, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority has resurrected the H train as far west as Beach 90th Street and maintained the Q22 bus line for those going beyond Beach 90th. The interruption of reliable and rapid transit has left many Rockaway Residents with no choice but to increase their travel hours, sometimes taking up to three hours to commute one way to work, school, and even doctor's appointments. **One young boy, named Julio, shared that he travels three hours every weekday morning to attend the school which has been relocated to the Bronx**, while another young boy relocated to a school in Jamaica complained of a 90 minute commute. Along with routine trips mandated by daily necessity, weekend trips to places of worship have been impacted, leaving local congregations with lower turnout than usual.



Victims of Hurricane Sandy line up to receive emergency supplies at Mount Carmel Baptist Church in Far Rockaway

Ten Point Strategy for Equitable Recovery and Rebuilding

1) Fix NYC Rapid Repair Program immediately

Mayor Bloomberg should fix the "Rapid Repair Program" by increasing the supply of electricians and plumbers through the granting of waivers for contractors licensed from government agencies outside of NYC to work in the city at this critical time. Also, when a renter calls 311 to request a Rapid Repair, the city should immediately send a letter to the owner of the property, demanding that the owner enroll in Rapid Repair or threaten to put a lien on the property within 7 days.

2) Include mold remediation as work covered by the NYC Rapid Repair Program, in addition to electricity, heat, and hot water

The NYC Rapid Repair Program exists to assist property owners who do not have insurance with the life saving repairs of electricity, heat, and hot water. The Rapid Repair Program should also include mold remediation.

3) Establish testing sites for health and air quality throughout Zone A

Establish health testing sites across the Rockaway Peninsula, and make the results public information.

The New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the New York City Department of Health (DOH) should carry out air and water quality tests on a daily basis and share the results publicly.

4) Create disaster relief channels for New Yorkers who do not qualify for government disaster aid, such as some immigrants

Open up disaster relief eligibility to all New Yorkers, regardless of immigration status. This should include a local vehicle for transferring funds from FEMA to all local residents and workers. Open up eligibility of State Disaster Unemployment Assistance (DUA) to immigrants. New York City and New York State should establish an emergency fund that allows immigrants to access much needed relief.

Establish a fund with a mechanism for undocumented immigrants to access aid in future disasters (aid can be from government or from volunteer donors with government aiding in publicity of the fund).

5) Keep FEMA Emergency Supply shelters open until late at night.

Workers and students who must commute long distances wake up early and arrive late at night into their homes. However, Emergency Supply Shelters tend to operate between the hours of 10:00am and 4:00pm, locking out hungry people arriving home late from school and work. Shelters should stay open until at least 8:00pm to allow workers arriving home late to access emergency supplies and information.

6) Hold insurance companies accountable to hurricane-affected residents.

City should set up 3 Department of Financial Services Command Centers in Far Rockaway to receive claims of unfair treatment by insurance companies. Create stronger laws to make sure insurance companies are paying policy holders. Hold insurance companies accountable to paying for damage based on flooding and hurricane damage. Issue a report card showing how responsive insurers have been to homeowners.

7) Build affordable housing for middle and low-income families

Much of the housing that was lost or severely damaged by Hurricane Sandy provided affordable housing to middle and low income families. New or rebuilt housing structures need to guarantee affordable rents to these same middle and low income families, versus replacing them with market rate housing more typical of beach communities in nearby Long Island.

8) Create recovery and rebuilding jobs that will put affected residents back to work.

A regional stimulus program should be created with job training centers to train local residents to carry out rebuilding efforts so that we can build back better and offer much needed employment opportunities to residents in places like the Rockaways. Create a regional "Economic Development Plan" to guide economic revitalization of historically economically depressed communities (for example, remake the Rockaway Peninsula into a tourist destination as it was in the middle of the 20th Century while preserving the local character and content of the community).

9) Ensure that the \$42 billion federal request for aid includes grants for congregations to repair and rebuild, and improved public transportation options in places like Far Rockaway

Congregations and houses of worship are serving as key hubs for the distribution of goods and the provision of services, but many are damaged and need help with repair costs. The Small Business Administration is offering loans with a 3% interest rate to assist with the cost of repairing congregations whose insurance does not cover damage inflicted by Hurricane Sandy. However, many congregations sustained hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of damage, and a 3% interest rate is too high for most of these vital community institutions. We recommend legislation that will open grant opportunities to congregations that continue to provide essential goods and services to members of their surrounding communities. Additionally, we recommend that federal grants be used for the MTA to make available more direct transportation options for students and workers from the Rockaway Peninsula. A direct, non-stop bus to the E and A train stops in Mainland Queens as well as a non-stop bus to Manhattan would expedite commutes significantly.

10) *Create a community-driven process to plan and oversee the rebuilding of New York communities devastated by Hurricane Sandy.*

Governor Cuomo and Mayor Bloomberg have requested over \$19 billion in recovery funds from the Federal Government for New York City. A public "Participatory Budgeting" process should be adopted to shape how and where those funds are used to rebuild communities hit hardest by Hurricane Sandy. "Participatory Budgeting" lets the whole community participate in decision-making. We recommend a process of public meetings, to make sure that people have the time and resources to make wise decisions. Community members should discuss local needs and develop proposals to meet these needs. Through a public vote, residents would then decide which proposals to fund. A "Citizens Oversight Committee" should also be created to ensure Federal tax dollars are spent efficiently and expeditiously in a manner that meets the felt needs of families in these communities.



Individual Testimonies and Stories from the field

"We are tired and sick of waiting for Rapid Repair"

The Gonzalez family lives in Far Rockaway near St. Mary Star of the Sea Catholic Church. These Cuban immigrants have been without heat, hot water, or power for 6 weeks. On December 6th, George Gonzalez stood in line for 4 hours at FEMA, requesting money to fix his flooded vehicle. FEMA informed him that he doesn't qualify for a \$500 grant to fix his car. George's grandfather, Jorge, is a proud Army veteran who is very sick and does not have strength to clean their mold infested basement. "We need help fixing the mold. We're not interested in money; we need help," he said. George called Rapid Repairs, but was told they "are working with private contractors, and so you just need to wait".

"Rockaway is always the last to receive a helping hand" - Milton

Milton Martinez is one of the more fortunate tenants in Far Rockaway. His landlord replaced the boiler in the basement and his electricity was back within 20 days of Hurricane Sandy's arrival. However, none of this was due to a fair and rapid FEMA response. As renters, he and his wife were not able to get

assistance from FEMA, and are having to replace all of the items and clothes that were damaged in the flooded basement of their rental home. It was surprising to see that the loss of material items had less impact on his happy demeanor than his memory of a FEMA inspector asking him for his papers before anything else. Milton and his wife are legal immigrants from El Salvador. Though his family fared well in the end, he repeated the common frustration of many: "Rockaway is always the last to receive help."

"Mold keeps growing but we can't get enough help" - Jaime

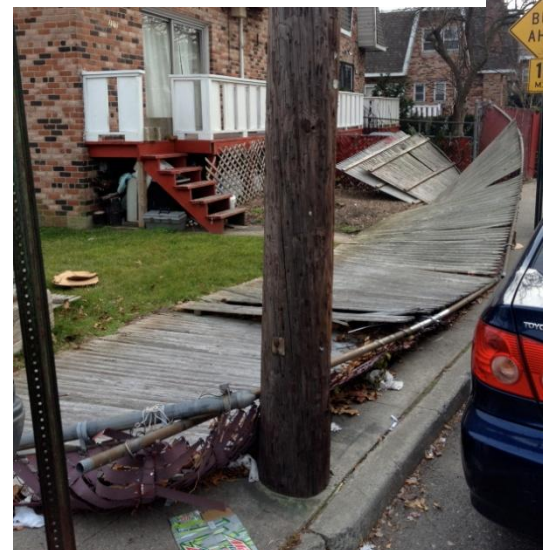


Jaime walking up the steps of his flooded basement

Jaime is an elderly man who's lived in his house off Beach 27th street for over 30 years. Hurricane Sandy was the second storm to hit his home but the first to cause severe damage to it. A month after the hurricane, Jaime is still without electricity, heat and hot water. His son, who he has been staying with him from time to time, is still attempting to bring inspectors from homeowners insurance, FEMA and LIPA to the house five weeks later. Jaime's car was destroyed, but because he only had liability, his insurance company will not replace it. A missionary group from Connecticut spent a day helping Jaime strip his basement, but was not able to give more than a day of their time. Many volunteer groups have blessed residents like Jaime, more long-term assistance is needed, especially for those with limited mobility and understanding of how to access help.

"I thought immigrants were New Yorkers, too" - Krystyna

Krystyna is a Rockaway resident who moved here from Poland looking for a better life. Krystyna was working full time as a domestic worker, cleaning houses for 15 different employers before the hurricane hit. After the hurricane, she went without work for over four weeks because of the damages to her employers' homes. She could not access any financial help as an undocumented immigrant. Many of her female friends are unemployed domestic workers and her male friends are working in disaster cleanup. Of her group of friends, she is the only one who did not lose her car in the storm, which she depends on to get to work. On her first day back to work,



she did basic cleaning in a house that was dusty and filled with mold. She was too afraid of scrutiny from her employer to use a mask, and by the end of the day she had a painful cough. As an undocumented immigrant, Krystyna is afraid that if she complains about work conditions or even wears a protective mask, she could lose her job. She and her friends have also been afraid to approach the relief centers for help. "One time we went to get hot food and they asked for an ID and we ran because we were scared," she said.

"My insurance denied me coverage" - Roha

Roha Singh is a homeowner who currently has water coming in through the roof due to damaged and missing shingles, possibly creating mold and already ruining the attic and its contents, including mementos of a recently-deceased relative. His insurance denied him coverage, but he hasn't received the denial letter yet so he can't get FEMA money for emergency relief. He already repaired the heat, hot water and electricity with his own money, which cost approximately \$3,000.

Conclusion

The road to recovery for New Yorkers impacted by Hurricane Sandy will be a long and arduous one. We have an opportunity to bring a community together; an opportunity to give people, who for decades have been marginalized, a voice in how their future is shaped by public policy. The issues that surfaced from thousands of conversations with people from the Rockaways existed before Hurricane Sandy and will be there many years after unless we act now. Those that have the power to decide on policy, regulation and resource flow have to take into consideration the needs and hopes of the Rockaway community, or we can expect many families in a similar situation by the New Year. The local community needs to be deeply engaged in the process of relief, recovery and rebuilding of the Rockaways.

For more information

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Sources

US Congressman Gregory Meeks

New York State Assemblymember Phil Goldfeder

New York State Assemblymember Michelle Titus (staff)

New York City Council Speaker Christine Quinn (staff)

New York City Councilmember and New York State Senator-elect James Sanders (staff)

Mike Carl, FEMA Queens Division Supervisor

Morgan Jones, Eastern Queens Director, Community Affairs Unit, Office of Mayor Bloomberg

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